TANBO

by Mark Steere

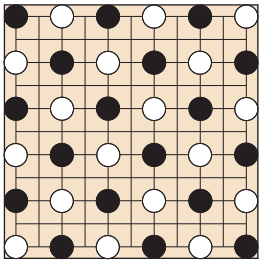

Fig. 1 - Initial setup

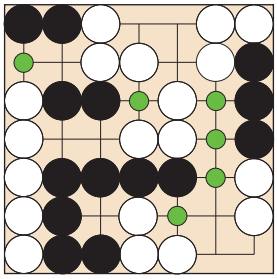

Fig. 2 - Legal placements for Black

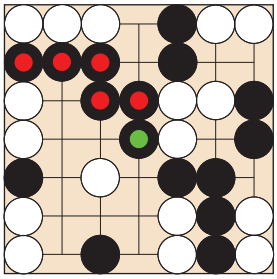

Fig. 3 - Current root capture

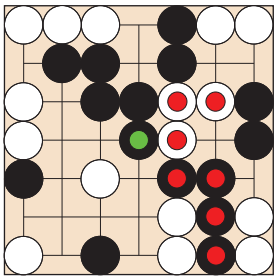

Fig. 4 - Non-current roots capture

INTRODUCTION Tanbo (Japanese for "rice paddy") is played on a grid of size 7x7, 11x11, 15x15... Or 9x7, 13x11, 17x15,... Dimensions increase in increments of 4. The board is initially populated with black and white stones, thoroughly interspersed, with one empty point (intersection) between stones, as shown in **Figure 1**. Mark Steere designed Tanbo in 1993, and updated it with a denser starting position in April, 2026.

PLAY The two players, Black and White, take turns placing stones of their own color onto unoccupied points on the board, one stone per turn, starting with Black. You must place your stone orthogonally (horizontally or vertically) adjacent to exactly one of your on-board stones. [All relevant adjacencies here are orthogonal.] In **Figure 2**, Black can place a stone on any of the points marked with a green dot.

ROOTS A "root" is root-like, monocolored group, which could be a single stone. The game begins with a fixed number of roots. Roots cannot merge together, and new roots cannot be created. The "**current root**" is the root which you enlarged during your current turn.

BOUNDED ROOT A root is "**bounded**" if it has no "**liberties**". That is, there is no unoccupied point which is adjacent to exactly one stone in a bounded root and which is not adjacent to any other stones of the bounded root's color.

CURRENT ROOT CAPTURE **If your placement has bounded your current root, you must immediately remove your current root from the board**, concluding your turn. In **Figure 3**, Black has placed the stone marked with a green dot, bounding his current root. He must immediately remove his current root - that is, all of the stones marked with red or green dots - concluding his turn.

NON-CURRENT ROOTS CAPTURE **If your placement has not bounded your current root, but has bounded other roots, of either or both colors, you must immediately remove all of the roots that were so bounded**, concluding your turn. In **Figure 4**, Black has placed the stone marked with a green dot. His current root was not bounded, but other roots were bounded. Black must immediately remove all of the roots that were bounded - that is, all of the stones marked with red dots - concluding his turn.

OBJECT OF THE GAME The goal is to annihilate your opponent. When all of the roots of one color have been removed, the player of the other color wins. You can win on either player's turn.

DESIGN NOTES Tanbo was the second game I ever designed, back in 1993. It originally had a much sparser initial position, having only 16 stones on a size 19 board. Now in 2026, I'm re-releasing Tanbo, with a much denser initial position, but otherwise exactly the same rules. This creates more fluid, less stilted gameplay. Tanbo is a classic. It's been bastardized, butchered, and debased. But never equaled.

AUTHOR'S NOTE Feel free to publish this rule sheet, and to program the game of Tanbo. No licensing fee or royalties are expected. However please don't change the name or the rules, and please attribute the game to me, Mark Steere. My other games can be found at marksteeregames.com.

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